DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 295 417 FL 016 591

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TITLE The Mechanics of Securing Funding--The Grants Offfice Perspective.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 15p.; In: Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages for Business and the Professions (see FL 016 586).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; *Grantsmanship; Interdisciplinary Approach; Languages for Special Purposes; *Program Administration; *Program Development; Program Implementation; *Proposal Writing; Second Language Instruction

ABSTRACT

The perspective of the institution's grants office in securing and administering grants is important because it differs significantly from the project perspective. The project director focuses on the project concept, and the grants office addresses the institution's needs in administering it. The funding mechanism for interdisciplinary programs is similar to that of other programs, and the process includes developing the program plan, identifying funding sources, and writing the proposal. Each of these stages has problems and issues to be considered. Developing the plan includes the roles and commitments of participating departments or disciplines. Identifying funding sources includes tapping multiple sources for possible funding, looking for both formal and informal funding sources, and determining who should do the funding search. Writing the proposal includes good coordination of the proposal input and construction of the final product. There are techniques for developing projects and writing proposals to increase their likelihood of success. Competitive proposals demonstrate institutional commitment, strong program staff, long-range planning, good organization, good writing, a conservative and detailed budget, good cost-activity relationships, adherence to the guidelines for submission, strong justification of need, and strong likelihood of success. (MSE)

THE MECHANICS OF SECURING FUNDING-THE GRANTS OFFICE PERSPECTIVE

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THE MECHANICS OF SECURING FUNDING FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS IN LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS: THE GRANTS OFFICE PERSPECTIVE

WHAT IS THE GRANTS OFFICE PERSPECTIVE?

The role of the grants office is to represent the institution, rather than a particular porgram or department. This representation is the grants process is very important because it is the institution--and not the individual writing the grant proposal--that is the applicant for funds. The interests of the institution must be presented and protected at each stage in the funding process if all of the administrative, as well as programmatic, aspects of a project are to be addressed. The focus of the program developer on the project concept and the grants office focus on the administration of that project, provide the balanced view that is necessary for a proposal to be competitive. When one or the other of those views is absent from a proposal, it has little chance of success.

Institutional representation in the grants process is also important because there are significant costs associated with preparing a grant proposal, particularly an interdisciplinary proposal where no one college or department has full ownership. There are the contributions of faculty time to write the proposal, secretarial time to type it, staff time to review and process it, and out-of-pocket costs of literature searches, telephone, duplication, supplies and postage. At most institutions these costs are absorbed by an institutional account, separate from the academic departments. Since the total potential cost of submitting proposals usually outweighs the available resources, the institution, as the applicant, has to make decisions about which funding opportunities to pursue. Typically such decisions are made by the grants office.

When a faculty member proposes to seek funds for a particular activity, the grants office evaluates the proposal in terms of whether or not it is fundable, feasible and consistent with the goals of the institution. If it is all those things, the grants office will generally commit the institutional resources necessar to prepare the proposal. If the proposal is not attractive to the institution, the grants office will hopefully offer suggestions for improving it. But the only way the grants office can make effective decisions is to have prior knowledge of the project and to be involved in each step of its development.

It is important to note that the "involvement" of the grants office is not primary involvement. The proper role of the grants office is serving as a facilitator for the program, not a hinderance or interference. The grants office representative should not try to dictate program content, but rather, should serve as a reference on institutional policy and grantsmanship. For interdisciplinary programs, the grants office representative brings a broader institutional perspective to the discussions and helps the program developer anticipate problems and facilitate implementation.

WHAT IS THE FUNDING MECHANISM FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS?

In general, the funding mechanism for interdisciplinary programs is the same for other programs. Initially, a funding agency decides to award grants for specific purposes. A call for proposals is issued and application are accepted. Potential applicants are simutaneously designing programs that will need funding. They review all available solicitations and choose the most

appropriate one to respond to. An application is submitted to the funding agency in the form prescribed. The applications are re iewed through an open competition and those best meeting the priorities of the funding agencies are chosen for award.

The key steps in this process for interdisciplinary programs are: developing the program plan, identifying funding sources; and writing the proposal.

Developing the Plan

When developing an interdisciplinary program, it is important to keep in mind that each of the departments or disciplines involved will be working under certain constraints, some of which will be common to all but others of which will be unique. These constraints make certain aspects of the program attractive to some and unattractive to others. In addition, program goals may be perceived differently by different participants, making optimal program design difficult to achieve.

Some ways to overcome these problems is first to learn about the participating units. Talk to others before you begin designing the program. Consult with the project team at each step of development. Be flexible. Try to think creatively in designing the program so that every roadblock is not an insurrmountable problem that cannot be overcome because it was not considered in the original plan. .Make sure that the lead person for the program has strong interpersonal and managerial skills. And most importantly, be willing to sacrifice the optimal plan in favor of a workable plan.

Don't be afraid to conduct some serious negotiations in the process of developing a program. Firm commitments early on enhance the chances that the program will go forward, whatever problems occur. Give all of the participants some ownership in the program. Ask them to commit resources and make sure they share in the benefits. Also make sure that you include an institutional representative (such as a grants office staff member) on the planning team. This person can be an arbitrator when necessary, and when not, can provide invaluable information on the general administration of the program and the availability of institutional resources.

The final program plan should contain all of the information needed to complete a funding proposal. The elements of a well thought out program plan include: a problem statement; a set of objectives; a listing of the methods to be used to achieve the objectives; an evaluation plan; a statement of long-range goals for the program; and a statement of cost. The plan should revolve around the institutional capabilities available to carry out the work and should intend to derive results directly beneficial to the organization.

Identifying Funding Sources

Interdisciplinary programs are usually major institutional undertakings which require significant external support. You will probably not get all of the money you need from one funding source in one lump-sum allocation. In fact, you will be fortunate if you ever receive all of the money you need to do the program the way you want it done. Do not be discouraged by this. Instead, recognize the validity of the statement and design your

program accordingly. Concentrate your attention first on those activities that are most important to you, and then go back and embellish the plan with nice, nonessential extras that you would like to see funded.

A funding search begins when the program plan is complete. Without a firm idea of the sort of funding that is needed, it is almost impossible to identify the most appropriate source. You have to choose a funding source that fits your project; not the other way around. Programs that are designed to fit a funding source usually turn out to be far different from what the developers wanted. And they almost never reach full implementation or institutionalization.

When a faculty member comes to me with a well-defined program concept, I develop a funding strategy for it, similar to the business plan a new company might put together. Working with the program developer, I try first to identify all of the costs of the project. Then, we look at specific activity or phases of the project that might be funded separately. We discuss the institutional resources that are available for the project and decide how much more money is needed to complete the project. Once the project has been analyzed, costed out and broken down into discrete activities, a funding search can be done.

There are two types of external support that can be pursued for educational programs. There is funding that comes through formal channels and funding that comes through informal channels.

Formal channels are federal, state and local government agencies, foundations, professional organizations and corporations which routinely operate grant programs run on an open, competitive basis. Informal channels are more in the nature of fundraising activities, where money is given with no strings attached and awards are made on a discretionary, rather than competitive, basis. Both channels are important to pursue. Generally, the grants office pursues formal funding opportunities and it is up to the program developer to pursue informal sources.

Formal funding agencies are easy to identify. A number of appropriate sources for interdisciplinary/international programs are listed in the handout. The requirements of formal funding sources are clearly defined and well publicized. To take advantage of these opportunities, all that you need to do is prepare a proposal in accordance with the application guidelines and address one of the funding priorities of the agency. Learning to write highly competitive proposals takes time but identifying an appropriate funding source does not. Especially if you take the time to first develop a detailed program plan.

Informal funding sources are difficult to find but well worth the effort. The way to identify these sources is to talk to everyone you know about your project. With informal funding, the emphasis is on personal networking. Ask friends and business associates for suggestions of who could fund your project. Professional organizations, corporations and individuals oftentimes have the resources you need for your work, but they do not award funds routinely or even announce their availability. These funds are usually earmarked for

philanthropic pursuits, community relations activities or technical assistance contracts. Friends in high places professionally are the most likely to lead you to rich informal funding opportunities. These contacts should be carefully cultivated at all times, not just when you have a program in the offing.

One important aspect of the process of identifying funding sources is who should do the search. I try to put program developers directly in touch with funding agency representatives as soon as possible. I do this for several reasons: (1) no one can explain your program like you can so you should have the opportunity to sell it and hear how the idea is received. (2) It makes sense to have specialists talking to each other, not through a grantsperson. It gives the funding agency representative a chance to know you and you learn firsthand how the grants system works. (3) Making direct contact with the funding agency can lead to other opportunitities for professional development, such as serving on grant review panels or providing technical assistance to the agency. These activities will do as much to enhance your professional reputation as the grant work itself will. And the more you are involved in the total grant process, the better your chances of being funded.

Writing the Proposal

Generally, proposals for interdisciplinary programs are not well written. This is because no one person has total responsibility for their development. Input is provided at several levels. Major sections are written by different people. The finished document is often put together very hurriedly to meet the submission

deadline. The culmination of an interdisciplinary proposal effort is usually a proposal which reads like it was written--as it was--by a committee. One section may not relate directly to another; information may be included for one department and not for another; the tone of the proposal may vary from section to section; and oftentimes important information is omitted.

These problems are well known to proposal reviewers, many of whom have worked on interdisciplinary writing teams. Still, that knowledge does not temper their reviews. If you are going to put in a substantial amount of work on an interdisciplinary program, please be sure that the person responsible for pulling the final proposal together has very strong editorial skills. Give that person sufficient time to modify the proposal and make changes, additions and deletions. Do not assume that everyone's contribution will be of equal quality. Most importantly, do not have someone without the proper technical knowledge write sections of the proposal. Keep the content strong and the writing concise. A poor proposal can do as much damage to an institution's reputation as an exceptional proposal can do good. Interdisciplinary proposals are especially vulnerable to criticism because the criticism will extend beyond one program or department.

A good proposal contains the following elements:

- abstract or summary statement
- statement of the problem and its significance
- objectives to be addressed
- program design and procedures
- work plan and time schedule
- statement of capabilities
- future plans
- budget

Those elements may not be all that the proposal addresses, but if you want it to succeed, it must at least include those items in that order. The proposal should be prepared for the convenience of the reviewer. It should be easy to read, free of jargon and technically accurate and appropriate. Make use of charts and graphs. If necessary, include supporting materials in an appendix so that the reviewer has the choice of reading them or not. Make sure each section of the proposal can stand on its own merits, even if it means being somewhat redundant.

Put yourself in the reviewers place. Would you fund your proposal if you had no prior knowledge of the program developer or the institution? Get others to read the proposal and give you feedback. Colleagues are especially helpful in reviewing the technical merits of your proposal. Grants office staff will check to see that you have followed the application guidelines and have written a proposal for a general readership. Supervisors and administrators are useful in reviewing resource commitments and organizational goals. Be open to criticism and suggestions. Your proposal will be all the stronger for it.

TIPS FOR PROPOSAL WRITING

Consider the purposes of the proposal. The proposal serves two distinct purposes: (1) it is a **technical plan** to address a specific problem in a specific way; and (2) it is a **marketing tool**, designed to sell the technical plan to a skeptical audience. When you are writing the grant proposal, keep asking yourself, "Why should X Agency was to fund this project?" If you

cannot answer that question in three sentences or less, don't bother finishing the proposal. Because if you do not know why it should be funded, don't expect that a funding agency will.

Be truthful in the proposal. You will gain nothing by claiming expertise you do not have or promising results you cannot deliver. On the other hand, you should make the truth as attractive as possible. If, for instance, there is no way to guarantee that a particular project outcome will occur, admit it. Then explain how you intend to deal with that uncertainty. Be eloquent when something is to your benefit, be brief when it is not.

Be confident. State your case in positive terms and do not be afraid to pat yourself or your organization on the back. Give credit where credit is due and keep the rest for yourself. Remember--you have to convince a group of fellow experts that you can deliver what you promise better than anyone else.

Follow the proposal guidelines exactly. The guidelines the funding agency provides have been painstakingly developed through trial and error. The rules exist for a reason and should be observed. Neither the funding agency staff nor the reviewers will appreciate your work if you submit something other than what they requested. The place for individuality and creativity is in the process of defining the concept, not in preparing the application.

Write with an active, not passive, voice. You will do this and you will do that; not, something "may" be done or "could" result. Again, consider the impression you are trying to make.

Do not beg. There is nothing more damaging to a proposal than a statement which says in essence that the project should be furded because the applicant is too poor to do it alone. A request for project funds is not asking for a handout. It is an invitation to the funding agency to participate in an exciting, meaningful venture. Do not apologize for your request. Instead, emphasize the outstanding investment opportunity you are offering. In the grants business, nothing succeeds like success. If you don't sound successful, you probably won't succeed.

Do not make unsupported assumptions. Do not assume that the reviewers know anything about you or your program. Do not describe the problem without documenting its existence. Do not assume your project is innovative if you do not know for certain that it is. Do not propose your solution or approach as the only one that will work, even if it is. Instead, speak of it as the best or more beneficial approach.

Pay attention to the content and organization of the finished proposal. Your proposal should be neatly typed, easy to read, carefully formatted, well organized and inexpensively packaged. It should not feature printed covers, special divider pages and elaborate bindings. Those may add to its appearance and cost but they do not add to its fundability. In fact, the rule of thumb in grantsmanship is: the more attractive the proposal, the less important its content.

Use terms correctly. Goals are not objectives, objectives are not methods and methods are not measures of effectiveness. Goals are long-range benefits you hope to attain. Objectives are quantifiable outcomes of your program. Methods are the means by which you obtain the objectives. And effectiveness is measured by how well you met your objectives, not the plan you used to get there. When the preceding terms are used incorrectly in a grant proposal, the proposal becomes unclear...confusing...unfundable. A good idea means nothing if you don't know your means from your ends. And if you don't know your means from your ends, should you really be running a program?

WHAT MAKES A PROPOSAL COMPETITIVE?

A good idea is the essence of a successful proposal. Without that, no amount of good writing or good research will help. However, a good idea is oftentimes not enough. The competition for grant funds is fierce and will be even worse in the future. If you want your proposal to stand out, it has to be **exceptional**, rather than **acceptable**.

Outstanding proposals offer unique solutions or approaches to problems; they are cost-effective or easily replicable; they are innovative; they have measurable impacts; they provide a needed service or program; and they are realistic--they can be done with the time and money requested.

Competitive proposals share several common characteristics:

- they demonstrate institutional commitment to the program.
- the program staff has strong credentials to do the work proposed.
- there is evidence of long-range planning.

- the program plan is well thought out and organized.
- the document reads well.
- the budget is conservative and detailed.
- the costs for the program relate directly to the activities.
- the guidelines for submission were followed.
- there is strong justification of need.
- there is every likelihood of success.

STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN YOUR FUNDING POTENTIAL

-If you don't have the credentials needed, team up with someone who does.

- Use the reputation of your institution, if appropriate, to demonstrate capacity and enhance credibility.

- Begin with internal funding sources and work up to national sources as you build your track record.

- Use consultants to provide missing expertise.

- Read successful proposals and talk with successful program directors.

- Make personal contacts with the funding agencies.

- Use resource people such as your grants office staff in the proposal development process.

- Take criticisms of your program to heart.

- Don't be afraid to revise your concept.

- Keep current in your field.

- Be sensitive to problems in your discipline or "gaps" where grant work is needed.

- Attend more conference sessions like this.